

Mostly Rubbish

by Robert Gear (March 2018)



647 West 42nd Street, New York, Stephen Dillies, 2009

The ersatz religion of Environmentalism has 'recycling' as one of its central dogmas, and no amount of facts and stats can dissuade a votary from his or her dedicated worship. This belief system is a mansion with many rooms out of which few exits lead. It is also an ideology, and the ideologically driven fail to understand the deeply ironic turn of events when the virtue drug leads to long-term ignominy. For unforeseen consequences are history's way of laughing—an ironic and inevitable cackling at our solemnly held beliefs; and this is surely true even of those of us who try to wrest some kind of sanity from the cascade of information to which

we are subjected.

Changing the world 'for the better' is a central tenet of the faith, too. But as someone has blasphemously pointed out, Marxists and their softer new-age ilk have been blundering along trying to change the world; the point, however, is to *understand* it.

Those ignorant of the longer term unforeseen consequences are in some sense the oblivious 'victims' of dramatic irony. For Kierkegaard (quoted in D.C. Muecke's *Irony*), "Irony . . . directs itself . . . against the whole given actuality of a certain time and situation." Perhaps, then, we are all victims of irony, metaphysically speaking. But we often have the sense that we know, as those swaddled in ideological blinders do not, how some of the narratives end—*because we have seen it so many times before*. This irony is what is perceived by those who understand what an earnest practitioner of environmentalism does not; that their prognostications and remedies are very often wrong and their policies doomed in the long run. But in the meantime, they create confusion in their turbulent wake. Truthfully, most ideologically tainted visions are 'irony free.' As Harold Bloom adroitly puts it, "ideology . . . particularly in its shallower versions, is peculiarly destructive of the capacity to apprehend and appreciate irony." Few environmental enthusiasts have the insight to say, as did Don Quixote in seeming to understand his own fiction, "I perceive everything I say as absolutely true . . . and paint it all in my mind exactly as I want it to be . . ."

So, how about the morally meddlesome recycling enthusiasts? Yes, this is low down the hierarchy of bureaucratic tyrannies but, nevertheless, part of the liberal/left narrative game

plan. The full range of such tyrannies somehow reminds me of a large basket (full of very strange, discredited, contradictory and often dangerous dogmas ranging across the centuries, and including the trilogy of the religion of peace among others) dangling on the end of a large cluster of untethered helium balloons floating disdainfully over our propagandized psyches. From the basket distend coiling and uncoiling tendrils disgorging into our minds a drug akin to Huxley's soma and intending to induce "coordination" or what the Nazis called *Gleichschaltung*.

Each of the balloons has to be burst one by one until the dogma monster is brought to earth.

Many municipalities in Europe and the United States pride themselves on their recycling programs. Interested parties might reconsider the value of such efforts. Think of the costs in time and money associated with the effort of separating out household waste, collecting it, using labor-intensive sorting systems, sending the sorted material to the businesses that then produce something that is of value to consumers. But the majority of householders have been bludgeoned into believing that they are helping to 'save the planet' or some such rubbish.

Who is behind this push to regulate the lives of consumers? In general, it comes from left-leaning irrationalists; that is, people who like the idea of controlling others. Many also reap rewards in salary, status and self esteem. Pile onto that media wackos, politicians, bureaucrats, local busybodies and waste-handling corporations, and you get an almost unassailable program of fakery.

We should make no mistake; there are many here among us who like to control others. In *The Captive Mind*, Czeslaw Milosz argues convincingly how the twentieth century mind is vulnerable "to seduction by socio-political doctrines and its readiness to accept totalitarian terror for the sake of a hypothetical future." His immediate target was the imposition and maintenance of communism in post-World War II Poland; although Milosz notes that "the book transcends limitations of place and of moment." Perhaps "totalitarian terror" is too strong a word for the imposition of stupidity and make-work schemes by subtle and sometimes openly intimidating state power. Yes, this is low-level oppression, but as with so many of the environmentalist dogmas, we are all subject to their injunctions.

Not surprisingly, much of the pressure to conform comes directly from school children. But of course, children didn't come up with this idea of sacrifice by themselves. Naturally, schools propagandize their little ones to shame their parents to do this "for the sake of the planet." The pressure is clearly part of the wholesale indoctrination pursued by leftist ideologues who have largely taken over school efforts at spreading garbage guilt and a "morally uplifting" pastime suitable for the whole family. This effort is not based on well-researched science; it is mostly opinion and virtue pushing that sometimes forms children into Mini-Me *Stasi* informers.

Please, if you are a recycling enthusiast, don't fling your plastic rattles out of the perambulator. That would create litter, which is indeed a real problem. But we will see that the policies you espouse could be more damaging to the

environment than just throwing rubbish into the garbage can, from where it can be taken to a landfill dump—like in the old days.

In the interest of keeping this article relatively brief, I will deal here with only three basic myths of the recycling doctrine. Some researchers, for example, Daniel Benjamin of the Property and Environment Research Center, have expounded on many more.

First, landfill space is *not* at a critical saturation point. For most of us, this canard started in 1987 with the notorious case of MOBRO 4000, a garbage barge, that wandered up and down the Atlantic coast and even as far as Central America trying to find a municipality that would agree to take the vast pile of waste into one of its landfill sites.

As you might expect, the organization Greenpeace made much hay out of this fiasco. Government regulation had made the mooring and dumping of this waste a near impossibility. Apparently, the critical shortage of landfill space myth was dreamed up by EPA elites and became a popular form of hysteria in the late 1980s. That beacon of untruth, sometimes known irreverently as “algore” in recognition of the inconvenient possibility that he had been beamed down from somewhere else, got into the act. During his political tenure (and after), this man doubled down on demonstrable fantasy (about many things) but, for a time, he became apoplectic in his belief that the United States was running out of landfill space. In fact, the space issue is a fake news issue only. And no, garbage dumps don’t smell bad after being covered with soil. Anecdotally, when I lived in Scandinavia, a local dump was covered with snow for about 5 months of the year. And guess what? The whale-shaped mound was

used as a practice ski run.

I was recently present at a local 'recycling meeting,' and had the temerity to ask the sustainability expert if there was room for new landfills in the American State in which I currently live. The expert and most of the serious, good and dedicated people at the meeting chuckled because, as the expert indicated, vast swathes of land used for nothing in particular could be used as dumps. So, the landfill myth seems no longer to be believed *even by the recycling devotees*.

Oh, but what about the poor trees? Trees harvested for manufacturing paper products are planted for that purpose. *That is why they are grown*. If people didn't want so much of the flat white stuff, fewer trees would be grown. In the same way, if people wanted fewer potatoes, fewer would be farmed. If people wanted fewer antiquated, cumbersome black and white televisions then fewer would be manufactured. Oh . . . wait a minute. Trees are a very sustainable product. Timber companies manage and sustain forest growth *because it is in their interest to do so*. Therefore, if the demand for pulp decreases, fewer trees will be grown (other things being equal). Yes, tropical rainforests have been depleted (for a variety of reasons) but the underlying cause is lack of property rights in regions so decimated. Therefore, newsprint devourers, such as *New York Times's* readers, can rest easy on that score.

Another prominent myth is that recycling paper and plastic saves money. The authorities I have researched agree that in general the cost of producing 'virgin' paper and plastic is cheaper, sometimes much cheaper, than producing these products from recycled waste. And besides, manufacturing new plastic or

paper, when all the costs associated are added up, is less polluting. [Watch](#), for example, the hilarious online exposé of the recycling industry by the magicians, Penn and Teller. Naturally, the true costs of this recycling are hidden by government subsidies. Such subsidies are either provided by 'mining' citizens through taxation or by printing money (itself a form of hidden taxation). So, the unseen costs of the recycling craze are thus deleterious to the overall well-being of society.

The market price tells us whether a product should be recycled. If no one is knocking on your door asking for 'any old plastic' then we should know that this stuff has no value—or at least less value than is worth the while for someone to come and collect it. Not so long ago, people actually did this. These "scavengers" (for that is what they were) tramped around neighborhoods asking for stuff that we are now often legally obliged to recycle. The "rag and bone man" of yore, and those who yelled "any old iron!" wanted your castoffs since they could make money out of them.

Are there exceptions? Apparently yes. Some metals have value for recyclers and hence for the economy without the need for government subsidies. Aluminum especially, is cheaper to produce from recycled waste because of the high expense of turning bauxite into this useful metal. And some metal recycling companies will pay you for bringing them scrap metal.

Are there any benefits derived from recycling? Any at all? Well yes. As catalogued above, there are those who find benefit in the exercise of promoting recycling programs. These include public-relations experts, environmental organizations,

and waste-handling corporations. All of these derive salary and status from promoting rubbish recycling. In addition, some proponents argue that this activity creates employment in the guise of jobs sorting the stuff. These jobs are of a very tedious kind, and they are paid for out of the barrel of a gun—that is out of taxation. Mao's dictum is only slightly farfetched since the truth is that law-abiding citizens in the timorous West have been fined and threatened with time behind bars for not following the "proper procedure." Yes, yes, Mao was responsible for the death of 'well over 70 million people' (Chang and Halliday's calculation), but the underlying ideological "perspective" is not so very different, as Jordan Peterson has tirelessly explained.

Apart from products which the market determines are valuable and therefore worth recycling, what rewards arise for those who insist on investing time in this peculiar pursuit? Here I mean not those listed above who feed off the frenzy, but the average citizens who do as they're told. Yes, there are benefits. The first of these stems from the universal tendency to seek psychic profit. According to Ludwig von Mises in *Human Action*, ". . . every individual derives a psychic profit from his actions, or he would not act at all." And people gain such intangible rewards when they *imagine* they are doing good. So, things that we feel good about doing, and which result in psychic profit to the individual, may be a loss to the community or larger society.

Also, when we spend time cleaning, sorting, carrying and dragging bins around, we get valuable utility exercise—the kind we get when we are not trying to exercise, the kind that most people benefited from before the modern era with all the labor-saving technologies. And, no doubt, composting one's own food waste provides a valuable addition to the fertility of

soil. But this latter activity has been carried out *voluntarily* for millennia.

Eventually, views that are accepted and trumpeted at one point of history are often discarded when open-minded people take a closer look. The clouds fall from our eyes and we see we have been mistaken all along. Think, for example, of phlogiston and alchemy or Ernst Haeckel's fabricated drawings of embryonic development. As the philosopher, Keith S Thomson, argued in repudiating the erroneous, but much admired (because it appeared to buttress Darwinian theory), Haeckelian view of embryonic development, "We often are highly conservative and will hold to a viewpoint longer than is justified when there is no alternative or, worse, *when the logical alternative upsets the rest of our world view*" (italics added). That said, trying to get recycling devotees to think through their credal certainties is about as likely as achieving success in getting a chimpanzee to explain the equation supporting the Hubble Constant. Will the recycling craze be confined to the garbage can of history? Other enthusiasms, such as the inhaling of tobacco products, have become unfashionable, and so there is hope that this unnecessary pastime can also be discarded.

Of course, if you enjoy wasting time doing stupid things, how about just taking up recreational drug use? Alternatively, you could try helping Wile E. Coyote catch The Road Runner in a never-ending round of senseless (but ingenious) schemes. The animated versions are at least amusing and a testament to the failure to let facts get in the way of a senseless belief system. And yes, we know how these stories end—*because we have seen them so many times before.*

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